

Introducing the Concord-Alewife Planning Study



The Study Area

Local committee guides study effort

In December 2002, the City Manager appointed a Study Committee to guide the Concord-Alewife Planning Study – a planning effort with the goal of developing a vision for Concord-Alewife and establishing a plan that outlines the steps necessary to turn that vision into reality.

Located between Route 2 and Concord Avenue, and Blanchard Road and Danahy Park, the Study Area includes the

sub-areas known as the Cambridge Highlands, the Triangle, the Quadrangle, and the Fresh Pond Shopping Center. There is significant development potential within portions of the 180 acres that make up the Study Area – giving great importance to this process and its outcomes. The study area residents, property owners, and representatives of businesses and institutions that make up the Study Committee represent a diverse range of interests and perspectives.

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Working collaboratively with the Community Development Department and the consultant team led by Goody, Clancy & Associates, the Study Committee has been looking at opportunities, challenges, and issues concerning:

- The proper mix of uses, including housing, office/R&D, industry, retail, possible City uses, open space;
- Transportation and access;
- Urban design and the character of future development;
- Key linkages.

The Study Committee has met six times since February 2003, including a bus tour of the Study Area. A mapping exercise from the initial meeting – in which committee members drew their impressions of the Study Area – began to articulate goals. These goals continue to be important topics for committee discussion:

- Plan for appropriately-sized development with a mix of uses;
- Preserve the character of the Cambridge Highlands neighborhood;
- Overcome barriers and link nearby open space resources for bicyclists and pedestrians;

- Create true destinations for neighborhood activity, and social gathering;
- Increase the sense of "place" within the Quadrangle;
- Improve the pedestrian experience and increase overall walkability and accessibility to the T;
- Address the impact of vehicular traffic within the area.



Members of the Study Committee working on a "mental mapping" exercise

Who's on the committee?

Study committee members are:

Patricia Amoroso	Pat Goddard
Arben Arapi	Mitchell Goldstein
Nigoghos Atinizian	C J Mabardy
Joseph Barrell	Hom Sack
Doug Brugge	Ann Tennis
Margaret Callahan	Linsday (Peter) White
Susan Glazer	Albert Wilson, Jr.

The Study Committee has been working with City staff and the consultant team throughout the process and will help to formulate recommendations that will be transmitted to the City Manager. Any proposed changes to the Zoning Ordinance will be transmitted to the Planning Board for further review and then submitted to the City Council for consideration.

March 27 – First Public Meeting

The first public meeting for the Concord-Alewife study was an opportunity for the Study Committee to hear back from the public about emerging themes that evolved from Committee discussions. After a presentation about the existing conditions and opportunities, participants broke into smaller groups to discuss a range of topics including:

- Overcoming barriers and improving connections.
- Supporting and enhancing the community.
- Building a real “sense of place”.
- Land uses and forming a district of “good neighbors”.
- Preserving the environment.

While the breadth of ideas represented the diversity of thought and perspectives, a number of common themes were evident in all of the groups. These are summarized below:

Land Use

Develop a mix of uses including new open spaces, housing, neighborhood-based services, retail, and light industry with appropriate density. Currently, land uses within the Study Area do not relate well to one another. Having a more rational land use pattern would encourage people to interact with each other, thereby facilitating a sense of community.

Mobility, Accessibility, and Safety

Planning should address concerns regarding cut-through traffic on local streets. Also, there are areas within the Study Area that are either uninviting or unsafe for pedestrians due to speed or volume of traffic, urban design quality, or activities associated with the surrounding land uses.

Planning for Concord-Alewife should lead to an environment where it is desirable for people to walk and interact with each other. This may involve creating different types of connections that don't exist today, but could be possible with redeveloped sites.

Identity and “Sense of Place”

There is a lack of a coherent identity within the Study Area today. A planned land use pattern, new amenities, and a more defined street system around which development could occur would give the Quadrangle a sense of place.

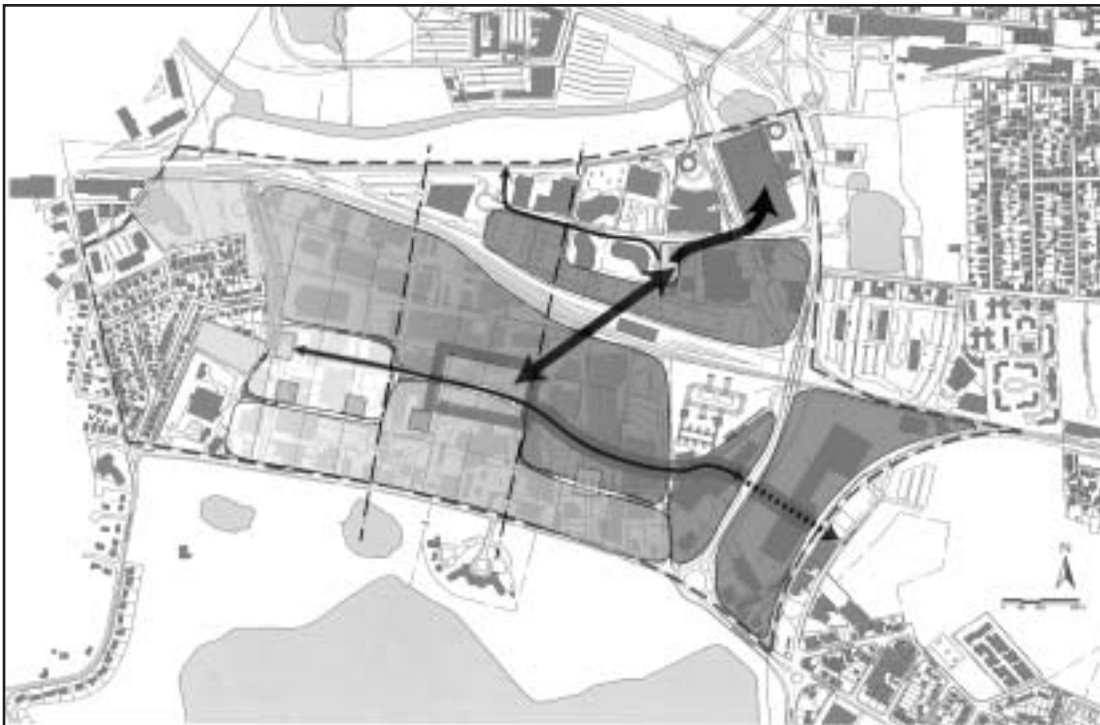
Open Space Resources

Many components of the open space system around and within the study area are hidden; improved pedestrian and bicycle connections to and between these resources should be a priority. In addition to enhancing connections to existing open space resources, participants favored creating new open spaces, especially within the Quadrangle to integrate surface run-off and improve water quality.



The feedback from the group discussions will inform planning work in Concord-Alewife

June 7 – Second Public Meeting – Building Blocks to an Emerging Vision



At the June 7th meeting, the following two conceptual scenarios developed through Committee discussion were presented to the public. The key elements of these scenarios include the following:

- Allow a mix of uses, including an increased amount of housing, throughout the Study Area.
- Allow higher density development closer to the Alewife T station.
- Allow higher density within the Quadrangle if a connection over the rails to Alewife station can be created; lower density without a connection.
- Allow low intensity of uses and lower heights closer to the Highlands.
- Create a landscaped buffer between the Highlands and the Quadrangle.

June 7 – Second Public Meeting – Building Blocks to an Emerging Vision

At the public meeting on June 7th, over forty people gave valuable input to the framing of a vision for Concord-Alewife. Following an update on the committee's work and analysis conducted by the consultant team, the meeting attendees worked in small groups to build three-dimensional models that represented their long-term vision for the Study Area. Participants were asked to think about:

- What land uses they would like to see and where they should be located;
- Appropriate heights and densities in different parts of the study area;
- Where and how important connections should be made.

Key themes that emerged from the working groups are highlighted below.

Land use and scale

Encourage a mix of land uses. Participants suggested focusing higher densities toward Alewife Brook Parkway and the Alewife MBTA station, thereby taking advantage of existing public transportation. They also recommended locating moderate-scale housing along Concord Avenue. Housing would add vitality to the street edge and serve as a good connection between Cambridge Highlands and other residential neighborhoods.

Open space and adequate buffers

Participants were enthusiastic about protecting the environment and encouraging use of existing open space resources. They strongly recommended creating a green buffer between the Cambridge Highlands residential neighborhood and the nearby industrial area. Participants also suggested the creation of open spaces within the Quadrangle as an amenity to give the site a sense of place and to benefit stormwater control and quality. It was also thought that any redevelopment in the Study Area should result in improved drainage.

Circulation and connections

Participants recognized that there are many green and open space resources within the Study Area, but that access to them is not always easy. They recommended the creation of useful connections to open space resources and other parts of the Study Area without generating additional traffic. A connection across the railroad tracks for more direct access to the T station was another point raised, as well as the development of a pleasant pathway system within the Study Area to encourage non-auto modes of transportation. Participants desired more transit options and improvements and discouraged cut-through vehicular traffic. Safety was consistently expressed as a priority.



Models developed by the participants at the June 7th meeting.

What's Next?

The Concord Alewife Study Committee will continue to meet approximately once a month through mid-2004. All Committee meetings are open to the public. A number of public meetings will be scheduled during the course of the project. The next one will be scheduled for Fall 2003. Additional information is also provided on the Concord Alewife Planning Study webpage at:

<http://www.cambridgema.gov/~CDD/commplan/zoning/concalew/index.html>

For upcoming meetings, visit our schedule at:

<http://www.cambridgema.gov/~CDD/meetings.html#cpconcale>

If you have questions about this project or would like to be included on the mailing list for notification of upcoming public meetings, please contact Iram Farooq at 617-349-4606 or ifarooq@cambridgema.gov.



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